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“Acollim.coop”: the social and solidary economy in the reception of unaccompanied young migrants

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Cooperativism and SSE can play an important role in the reception of unaccompanied young migrants. The ‘Acollim.coop’ is a cooperativism integral strategy that assumes a set of differential contributions such as to prioritize the needs of young in contrast of the profit, to enable a structuring structure of integral answers from cooperativism and intercooperation, to activate networks of cooperation where they play a leading role by themselves or to put into practice a community-rooted reception.

1. The migration of unaccompanied minors to Catalonia

‘One very important change in countries now is that some towns are emptying of young people. Young people will not change their minds about coming, the resources that are meant to keep them are no use because they always think that they want to prevent migration. The idea of coming cannot be changed, but it is possible to explain the reality that they will find here, and then they can take step of migration consciously so that the impact is not so traumatic’ (Young person of legal age interviewed in May 2019)

The mobility and displacement of minors and young people on their own has been occurring for centuries throughout the history of Europe and the world, but the migratory phenomenon known as ‘unaccompanied minors’ (UM) appeared between 1980 and 1990 in Europe, linked to the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989. This new childhood category entailed a change in approaches, and a new protectionist perspective was implemented, granting all minors the need to be protected and placed in the care of institutions that have competence in the protection of minors.

The migration of unaccompanied minors has become part of the panorama of international migration, and the displacement of underage young people on their own, without older family members, is not unique to Spain, but occurs in many other geographical locations: Mexican minors emigrating to the USA, Bolivian minors emigrating to Argentina to work in the textile industry, Afghan minors in Denmark and many other examples. The migration of unaccompanied minors and young people is a transnational and global phenomenon. The fact that the migration of unaccompanied minors presents some specific particularities that distinguish it exclusively from other types of migration places us in a situation in which the migration of minors on their own constitutes them as a ‘new migratory actor’ and they are configured as an analytical category with their own identity, with specific motivations and objectives and with placement paths in broader and different migratory spaces, examples such as the creation of transnational solidarity networks

based on age groups, their own forms of job placement or self-representation through identity signs (Suárez, 2006).

The arrival of these minors and young people has presented a challenge to Catalan society and to the public administrations from the moment these minors and young people began to be detected by protection services, now almost 25 years ago. The first unaccompanied minor documented in Spain arrived in 1993, and in 1997 there were 81 minors, and in 2001 the number had risen to 591 (Quiroga, Alonso and Soria, 2010). Although this phenomenon remained stable, with a volume of around 400 new arrivals each year, from 2016 a new phase began that was characterised by an exponential increase in arrivals and by the collapse this caused in the public administrations' reception and protection systems: 684 minors in 2016, 1,489 in 2017 and 3,659 in 2018. It is predicted that in 2019, the number of minors could reach approximately 5,500 (Ombudsman's Office, 2018).

Although years have passed, the motivations remain very similar and affect the young people's biographical trajectories: economic motivations, improvement in social and cultural expectations, fleeing from war or conflict, or political, ethnic or religious persecution, or fleeing from a significant family conflict, especially in the case of young people, in which motivations have aspects specifically related to gender inequality, and which must be dealt with differently (Quiroga, Alonso and Soria, 2010).

2. Cooperativism and care for people in the community

The cooperatives, which began in the mid-19th century, had important historical roots in Catalonia in all their forms, and organised work, buying and selling in common. These companies are societies constituted of natural or legal persons who have joined together to improve the social and economic situation of its components and the community as a whole, through collective business activity. They can carry out any economic or social activity. To understand how the practices of the social and solidarity economy (hereafter SSE) can affect the reception of unaccompanied minor migrants, it is first necessary to understand the seven guiding principles of cooperative practice: voluntary and open membership, democratic member control, economic participation of the members, autonomy and independence, education, training and information, cooperation among cooperatives, and concern for the community (International Cooperative Alliance).

Cooperatives work to achieve the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their social fabric and, with the application of the cooperative principles, cooperative businesses help to create a better world, starting with the following actions:

- Create stable and good quality employment.
- Contribute to economic growth based on sustainability, which surpasses short-term perspectives and commits to the diversification of activities.
- Work based on the needs of the people and with concern for the community and the environment.
- Support rural areas and agricultural activity, in a way that allows farmers' processes and prices to improve, as well as urban areas, professionals, shops, artisans, etc.
- Give the people a voice and empower them to make business decisions, in a way that promotes democracy.

Today, a total of 4,310 cooperatives are registered in Catalonia, 74% of which are associated work, 10% farming and 5% services, and the remaining 11% are consumer, housing, education or other cooperatives (Department of Employment, 2019).

In a study by the Confederation of Cooperatives in Catalonia, it was highlighted that cooperative businesses have a turnover of €4,614 million and represent 1.5% of the total employment generated in Catalonia. Since 2009, the year immediately after the outbreak of the economic crisis, cooperativism has grown in Catalonia. One of the most relevant pieces of data is that the creation of jobs grew by 118% compared to 2008. Of these jobs, 76% were permanent contracts, 77% were full-time and 8.6% were jobs created among people under 25. However, cooperatives in Catalonia represent 0.7% of the total businesses in Catalonia and provide 2% of the GDP (data from the second quarter of 2018, Department of Employment).

Under the broad umbrella of types of cooperatives, those that carry out social activities or care for people are called 'social enterprise non-profit cooperatives'. The aim of these cooperatives is job placement or integration of groups at risk of exclusion, or the defence of social rights or coverage of needs insufficiently addressed by the market, and can establish the participation of volunteers in the achievement of the corporate aim. These cooperatives carry out their activities in sectors involving care for the elderly or for people with disabilities, educational leisure, nursery schools, social exclusion or at-risk children. According to data from the Federation of Work Cooperatives of Catalonia, there are 167 social enterprise cooperatives in Catalonia, providing work for 11,000 people and bringing in €213 million.

3. The role of cooperativism and its differential value in the reception of young people

If cooperatives and the SSE can play an important role in the reception of young unaccompanied migrants, it is because it is a movement with its own ideological framework, equipped with structures, operating patterns and a capacity for adaptability that allow it to be a sector that is very conducive to innovation in order to deal with this situation of structural crisis and savage capitalism that excludes and stigmatises an important sector of the population.

Bearing in mind these ways in which cooperatives work, the SSE, within the framework of the reception of young migrants, can make differential contributions with respect to other social agents, both in the joining of measures and in the provision of distinctive values in its management models, anchored in their guiding principles. This link between cooperativism and the interest in promoting a quality reception focused on the rights of unaccompanied minor migrants has been the driving force behind the Catalan cooperative strategy 'Acollim.coop. A comprehensive cooperativism strategy for the reception of young unaccompanied migrants in Catalonia (2018-2021)' that is at the stage of definition and design and is promoted by social enterprise cooperatives, but which is a call to bring together the entire cooperative ecosystem. This comprehensive cooperative strategy, which aims to provide an integral and articulated response, commits to the following actions:

a) Prioritisation of the needs of the group of young people over profit

The SSE is an economy that seeks to satisfy the needs of people over profit, and one of the inherent principles of these business organisations is to work to achieve the sustainable development of its communities, fostering practices based on values such as humanism, democracy, solidarity, inclusivity, diversity and equality, fairness and justice for all. At the same time, these values encourage structures and shared co-governance platforms where projects are built collaboratively with a view to social change. Cooperativism is a very suitable agent for developing a whole set of coordinated measures and actions to confront the fight against the uncertainty and social inequalities that many of these young people find themselves in, especially because of their condition as migrants: difficulties obtaining the necessary permissions to work, difficulties accessing suitable housing, difficulties learning the language, the existence of xenophobic attitudes on the part of society, and economic difficulties, to name a few. And above all, considering the unaccompanied minors who reach the age of majority –a very important part–, and in the process of leaving the institutional systems, they are expelled from social protection circuits with significant deficits which follow them into their adult lives.

b) The SSE as an articulator of comprehensive responses from cooperativism

Also an identifying principle, cooperativism and the SSE are cooperative ecosystem¹ that continually practise the entwining, strengthening and promotion of inter-cooperative relationships², collaborating in all ways with other cooperatives on a local, national and international scale. Inter-cooperation allows them to share resources, projects and risks, on the one hand, but on the other, it is a proactive principle of putting solidarity into practice through mutual support. This inter-cooperation recognises and amplifies all forms of joining together, from informal networks to more formalised structures, such as federations, confederations, inter-cooperative agreements, second degree cooperatives or integrated cooperatives. And, at the same time, it promotes solidarity between people and organisations, distancing them from competitive expansion models and selecting models in which mutual aid is the key to growth and sustainability.

The Catalan cooperative strategy 'Acollim.coop' is formed from the shared cooperative identity and from an interdisciplinary perspective, with inter-cooperation as the basis of operation. This means that from the different productive sectors and areas of cooperatives, just as from the different types of cooperatives (work, farming, consumer, housing, services etc.), we can see each other, and think together about the actions and strategies that we need to deploy in a coordinated, linked and meaningful way, all together and simultaneously, which will allow us to have an impact on sectors that seem as distant as housing, placement, social cohesion and the fight against racism and stigmatisation. Moreover, cooperativism, in this model of constant inter-cooperation, repeatedly applies highly complex, multi-level forms of co-governance, while it also frequently integrates a multi-activity approach to becoming sustainable in the context of structural and social defragmentation.

With this alliance and the generation of shared resources, cooperativism can carry out entire, comprehensive, integrated projects, with a strong impact on the life trajectories of young people, guaranteeing paths that do not break when they reach the age of majority.

c) The capacity to respond to the needs of young migrants using cooperative networks in which they themselves have a central role

The social and solidarity economy foresees and defends an alternative way of producing, consuming and working and, therefore, of satisfying people's individual and collective needs. The SSE is committed to getting involved in the life pathways of young migrants beyond urgency and care, within the framework of the protection system. In this sense, it can become an agent that offers real options for young people to be able to carry out long-term life projects and attain citizenship rights. Above all, considering the fact that these young people, at the age of majority, find themselves outside the protection circuit, but still need to access housing, the labour market and social relationships.

One of the actions that 'Acollim.coop' can incorporate is to promote mutual assistance solutions and collective entrepreneurship processes in a cooperative format between the young migrants themselves and their predecessors, their communities of origin and destination, to resolve common needs, understanding that the cooperative formula can become a model of vocational integration for self-employment for groups beset by social inequalities and uncertainty. To manage to create and consolidate cooperatives of young people – work cooperatives but also other kinds. These models of job placement seek to avoid inequalities characterised by gender, defending

1. Local cooperative ecosystems is defined as those socioeconomic intercooperation circuits based on territorial proximity and strategic affinity, which combine a democratic organization, a solidarity economic dimension and a sociocommitory action that is relevant in its environment (Miró, 2018).

2. We define inter-cooperation as 'the creation of a network of links to build the social market beyond the strict relationship between client and supplier, that is, it is not just one collaboration, but a process of joint construction of cooperative economic relationships from the perspective of social transformation' (XES, 2016).

employment rights and with a view to dignifying employment conditions and people and fighting against employment insecurity. Cooperativism, fostering work cooperatives, encourages them to conform to the typical forms of self-organisation of social creativity: small dynamic work groups, capable of being reformulated collectively and permanently, which distribute power and internal initiative, and inter-cooperate through network and exchange and, therefore, promote the self-organised cooperative as a constituent node of the emergent productive creativity of society (Garcia, 2017).

At the same time, the cooperative practice of the cooperative people themselves, who are promoting the 'Acollim.coop' strategy, is an everyday example of transformation, empowerment and organised citizenship. The operation of cooperativism itself and the organisations that practise it has become a real, practical model of the possibility of change and social participation, and shows how models of collective entrepreneurship function in practice. Of how cooperative people respond collectively and cooperatively to individual needs which, in turn, are global. In this sense, the SSE has become an example of how, through self-organisation and cooperation between various agents, we can resolve housing, consumer, employment and service needs, always prioritising people's needs over profit.

d) A reception rooted in the community

The community aspect of cooperativism goes across all of its dimensions, allowing it to be able to commit to a reception rooted in the community receiving the young people, a reception that also considers the receiving community, to work together for social inclusion, taking advantage of the value of diversity and the complementarity that this phenomenon can bring.

As the SSE movement is committed to solidarity and social justice and fights against social inequalities, while also presenting a broad, dynamic social base with a solid foundation of social commitment, cooperativism is able to become this political agent of change and transformation with its focus on young people, and in the encouragement of strategies to involve the active participation of the society organised in the reception, as well as becoming involved as a strong, articulated political agent to denounce the violation of citizenship rights and the obstacles to accommodation in the current legal framework, especially in immigration law. It provides the opportunity to respond to a social problem by addressing integrality and complementarity. It also offers the possibility that the mesh of alliances and inter-cooperation allow their impact to affect not only the groups that form them, but citizens in general. This is placed at the centre of actions, through awareness-raising, encouraging the struggle against stigmatisation in order to counteract the story of fear and insecurity, deconstructing and dismantling racist and xenophobic narratives. On the path that this strategy has to travel, we must reinforce the commitment to entrepreneurship with processes that consolidate an organised citizenship guaranteeing its rights.

4. Cooperative responses to social challenges

It must be noted that it is the Public Administration that is responsible for responding to the needs of these young people with regard to all their processes of reception and social inclusion, and it must be the absolute guarantor of their citizenship rights. However, the SSE can help to guide this group to carry out their life paths through the fostering of projects and processes geared towards orientation, skills acquisition, information and work and social integration. And in this context, the SSE can form a bridge between the Administration and the people so that they can access the network's resources, help to connect them with the rest of the community, resolve doubts in their day-to-day life and link them to what they need, listen to their worries and work with the rest of society on raising awareness and conscientiousness.

The social intervention model in Catalonia has been debated for years, calling for the need for a change in the relationship and interlocution of public powers with organisations and with the citizens. To make this change of model effective, it is necessary to elaborate on a model of local intervention (close intervention, design, planning and management, located in the everyday,

community environment, rooted in and in harmony with the area) and on the promotion and facilitation of innovative, creative environments and spaces in which to experiment with formats and take risks (Rojo, 2010). These innovative spaces, where it is possible to experiment with the cooperative format, are understood from the models of social innovation that defend practices and processes of collective empowerment 'through which excluded communities respond to their basic needs transforming power relations and mastering the skills that can bring them greater independence' (Moulaert, 2010), configuring socially autonomous spaces, activating dynamics of inclusion and empowerment and, finally, generating new democratic institutions (VVAA, 2019). If we now recognise that 'the innovative forms of social creativity are coming into being outside of the market, where they produce what could be the social articulations of the future' (Miró, 2018) with an intent to provide a collaborative response, rooted and parallel to the great social challenges, then we can also recognise that the SSE, and cooperativism in particular, are important, necessary actors to promote social experimentation laboratories where self-organisation of collective intelligence becomes fundamental: of new lasting social bonds, of new rights, of new realities, of new goods and services self-produced by the community (Miró, 2018).

The contribution that the SSE can make to the reception of young unaccompanied migrants is also travelling in this direction. If cooperativism wishes to have an even greater social and economic impact on the community in which it is situated, one of the challenges is also to intervene and make proposals for society as a whole, not only proposals for internal use, but also proposals where it must be able to analyse the changes occurring in the social environment at historic moments in order to understand them, and propose corrective measures that can help to mitigate difficulties.

The 'Acollim.coop. A comprehensive cooperativism strategy for the reception of young unaccompanied migrants in Catalonia (2018-2021)' is the materialisation of what has been detailed in this article, a strategy of its own to the corresponding public administrations, as a commitment and capacity to put cooperativism into action, beyond social enterprise cooperatives that are already working on the reception of young unaccompanied minor migrants. A strategy that also emphasises the way it is being designed, the construction and elaboration, the core of which is being defined in a comprehensive, collaborative way, and with the participation and seeking the consensus of the maximum number of cooperatives, not only those of social enterprise. The launch of 'Acollim.coop' is also the time to be innovators, to experiment and to transcend some pre-established models already known to cooperativism, and will also have to test the capacity for leadership of a sector that seeks a radical transformation of our environment and the society in which we live, where the values that make up our shared identity and which set us apart from other types of business are the spearhead that guides our decisions and will make this strategy successful. We will have to face a great number of challenges. The first, to be able to manage real projects formed of the maximum number of cooperatives with very different objectives for involvement, from different productive sectors and of different kinds. The second challenge facing us is to be capable of becoming a real option so that the young migrants are able to satisfy their needs, especially for work and housing, from the perspective of rights, far from a care focus, adopting an intercultural and anti-racist position. However, positioning ourselves as a praxis of corporate responsibility and professionalism, alongside people who are capable of combating job insecurity as cooperatives. Third, a challenge linked to funding, understanding that the SSE can make much of little, but also being realistic about the fact that only with inter-cooperative combined funding can we realise a strategy of this scope. Finally, and possibly the most difficult, is how to incorporate the real participation of the young people themselves, the central characters, in the action in the very definition of 'Acollim.coop' in the first place, and secondly, in its execution, from the co-governance that will be deployed.

And in constructing new cooperative links to address social inequalities and the unfortunate insecurity of more and more groups, we will have to learn some lessons from other international travel associates, who have years of advantage. For example, Quebec, where it is clear that, in

order to develop sustainable practices in the articulation of cooperativism in the face of the great social challenges, different areas of agreement are needed, where co-governance, common identity and a global vision are essential, the experience of combining hybrid perspectives and spaces (sectors, territories, social movements) and a determination for collaboration, rooting in communities, as well as strengthening alliances to promote new models to continue to transcend the limits of the same area and reach the general public by increasing visibility (Boichat, 2016).

Ultimately, if cooperatives are diversifying, generate employability, and have their own operating structures and guidelines which, together with their capacity for adaptability, allow them to establish themselves as extremely conducive to innovation and hybridisation in order to face this scenario of structural crisis and inhumane capitalism, we are the spearhead against great social challenges, and the strategy 'Acollim.coop' can be a practical example of how to develop this in the reception of unaccompanied young migrants in Catalonia.

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